

The Practicability And Efficacy Of Total Quality Management In The Nigerian Public Sector: A Critical Examination

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Abstract

This study examined the practicability and efficacy of total quality management in the Nigerian public sector. The study also relied on secondary sources of data The study which contended that TQM is practicable, further reasoned that its reality will require a comprehensive and pragmatic non-political administrative restructuring, re-engineering and re-organization to meet the changing demands of the sector, institutional support and sustained effort to transform such reform initiatives (plans) into concrete reality as well as customer focus and orientation, synergy, attitudinal change, competitiveness, cost consciousness, innovation, modern management practice and a genial climate.

Introduction

Total Quality is now widely recognized and accepted as an effective management tool for improving organizational performance which in return offers benefits to customers, employees and other stakeholders. The key to organizational success through total quality is the effective implementation of processes that translate total quality concepts and principles into real performance improvements. Total quality that implies achieving quality in everything that is done, that is to say, all employees should endeavour to achieve perfection in all activities and at all times encapsulates four components viz: people, processes, products and services connotes quality people having the requisite skills, knowledge and ability to motivate subordinates to peak performance as well as quality processes that are capable of delivering the right products and service at the first time and every time in order to meet the needs and expectations of sundry customers. It is certainly not enough to achieve quality in one or two components, for an organization to become a total quality one, especially as quality must be achieved in all the components including service. This orientation has become inevitable for the public sector since governance is essentially about service delivery. All the same, the reality of the public sector environment that is characterized by inefficiency, ineffectiveness, low productivity and intangible productivity indicators, poor attitudinal and behavioural disposition and bureaucratic slow dance is, in actuality, constraining the practicability and efficacy of total quality management. This paper therefore

attempted an examination of the practicability and efficacy of total quality management in the public sector environment.

Quality: A Conceptual Understanding

The concept of quality is elusive largely because it is subject to different understanding and perspectives. Quality is meeting customer needs and expectations and it is determined objectively as a quantifiable or measurable characteristic or attribute. Quality is a description of the culture, value and attitude of an organization that strives to provide customers with products and services that satisfy their needs. The significance of this definition is evident in the understanding that it is the customer who determines quality. The customer's needs and expectations must therefore always be determined so that the right products and services can be delivered right at the first time and every time. The five rules for delivering quality are: fully understand and agree to customer needs and expectations, understand the organization's capability and not promise more than what can be delivered, deliver that which has been agreed without exception, be efficient and effective in meeting the customers agreed requirements and continually seek to improve organizational performance in meeting customers' needs and expectations. These five rules constitute what can be referred to as organizational culture. And culture must permeate the entire organization and serve as a benchmark for assessing or measuring its performance at individual, departmental and corporate levels.

Management: A Conceptual Discourse

The term management is defined variously in different contexts. In fact, existing definitions change as environments of organisations continue to change. Management, for instance, has been described as the "art of getting things done through people (Parker cited in Stoner and Freeman 2005:3). This definition, by Mary Parker Follett, focuses attention on the fact that managers achieve organisational goals by leading and guiding others to perform whatever tasks that may be necessary. Management, in this light, is seen as a process of planning, organising, leading and controlling the efforts of organisational members and of using other organisational resources to achieve organisational goals. Stoner and Freeman (2005:3) also opined that management can be seen as body of knowledge, that is, a field of study. In this context, management is a cumulative body of information that furnishes insights on how to manage. All the same, management is supposed to be an applied science, instead of just a theoretical one. This is particularly so because managers have to manage real human beings and every day situations, not theoretical ones. In this regard, it resembles other arts that are concerned with social practice such as law and medicine. Management could equally be defined as a distinct and leading group or a body of persons that perform the functions of planning, organising, directing, executing and controlling the resources of any organisation commonly referred to as the management process. In a similar vein, (Drucker 1978:7) defined management as the organ of institutions that converts a mob into an organisation and human efforts into performance. Management that

encompasses three basic skills: technical, human and conceptual is thus critical to organizational goal accomplishment.

The emergence of management as an established distinct and leading group is a pivotal event in social history. This established group has proven indispensable so quickly and will remain a basic and dominant institution, perhaps, as long as western civilisation itself survives. This view is hinged on the belief that management is grounded in the nature of the modern industrial system and in the needs of the modern business enterprise to which an industrial system must entrust its productive resources - both human and material. The important role of this distinct and leading group in the public sector like every other sector cannot be over-emphasised. This is because while every organisation constitutes three basic parts: people, tasks and management, it is management that organises the people that are involved in such tasks. According to Koontz, Donnell and Weihrich (2005:17), analyses of organizational failures made over several years revealed that a high percentage of these failures have been due to unqualified and inexperienced management. Essentially too, a prominent study of some American firms for several years found that organizations succeed almost invariably to the extent that they are well managed. Failures in organizations are, in fact, largely due to managerial incompetence and inexperience. The importance of management is thus nowhere better dramatised than in the case of many developing countries where the limiting factor in every case has been lack of quality and vigour on the part of managers.

Total Quality Management: A Conceptual Explanation

Total quality management (TQM) can be defined as a strategy for improving organizational performance through the commitment of all employees to the full satisfaction of the agreed customer requirements at the lowest overall cost through the continuous improvement of products and services, organizational processes and people involved. Total quality management is also a set of management practices throughout the organization geared towards ensuring that the organization consistently meets or exceeds customer requirements. The total quality management is equally a method by which management and employees can become involved in the continuous improvement of the production of goods and services. Total quality management is, in fact, a management approach that originated in Japanese industry in 1950s and has steadily become more popular since the early 1980s. Total quality management is therefore a management philosophy that seeks to integrate all organizational functions (human resource, marketing, finance, design, engineering, production, customer service etc) to focus on meeting customer needs and organizational objectives (Kanter 2003). To him, the simple objective of TQM is to do the right things the first time and every time.

Stoner et al (2005) defined TQM as “an organizational cultural commitment to satisfying customers through the use of an integrated system of tools, techniques, and training. TQM involves the continuous improvement of organizational process, resulting in high-quality products and services. Iyayi

(2004) sees TQM as route to and philosophy of excellence where excellences in organization means providing product and services that have good quality to a high degree. TQM as a route of excellence implies conscious, formalized and systematic process of seeking, advancing and organizational purpose of satisfying the customers and consequently improving the overall together performance of the organization. TQM is therefore a total orientation in doing things which required a complete reawakening on the part of both the management and the work force. TQM works when it is completely integrated into the culture of the organization and it becomes a way of life and an endless journey practiced by all. It ought to be a total culture driven and modelled by a perfect leadership. TQM means focusing on the production of increasingly better products and services at progressively more competitive prices. It means doing things right in organizations on the first try rather than making and correcting mistakes. Gbodimowo (1998) equally stressed that total quality management as ‘a service management led comparative initiative, intended to improve effectiveness and to build quality into the goods and services delivered, with the involvement of the whole workforce and a commitment to do the right things correctly.

In the same light, Ukaegbu (1995) posited TQM “as a strategy for improving organizational performance through the commitment of all employees to fully satisfying agreed customer requirements at the lowest overall cost through the continuous improvement of products and services, business process and the people involved. Total quality management (TQM) is both a management philosophy and a practical working process for achieving distinctive quality products and services at the lowest cost to the organizations which places the customer(s) on the highest utility curve (Macdonald 1999). According to Milakovich (1991:5) and Swiss (1992:12) TQM is now becoming recognized as a generic management tool that is applicable in public sector organizations. As its name connotes, TQM is an attempt to maximize quality within and through an organization. TQM involves the organization’s long-term commitment to the continuous improvement of quality; throughout the organization and with the active participation of all members at all levels, to meet and exceed customer expectations. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a philosophy which combines organization’s teamwork with the quality management philosophies of Deming and Juran. It requires that various departments be seen as “internal” customers as well as considering the needs and requirements of those outside who are external customers. Total quality management is a way of life for organizations and it must be initiated and monitored strategically by top management whose involvement and participation is critical to its success and discernible by others down the organizational ladder. Attempt to implement TQM fails because top management pays lip service. Such level of commitment will necessarily engender support and cooperation by other organizational members. Finally, structures, mechanisms and action vehicles are needed to engineer change through a well crafted and designed, appropriately implemented and adequately evaluated institutionalized total quality management strategies.

Stevenson (2005: 398) refers to the term total quality management (TQM) as quest for quality organizations. According to him, there are three key philosophies in this approach. One is a never-ending push to improve, which is referred to as continuous improvement; the second is the involvement of everyone in the organization; and the third is the goal of customer satisfaction, which means meeting or exceeding customer expectations. Again, total quality management is a philosophy of collective responsibility and doing it right at the first time as against traditional management that believes in discovering faults and remedying them. In fact, the classical management theory regards the customer and suppliers of the organization as external environment while TQM conceives the organization as being generally boundary-less because these stakeholders are included in TQM as external members of the organization. Their actions in relation to the operations of the organization are viewed as part of organizational processes. TQM involves the organization's long-term commitment to the continuous improvement of quality; throughout the organization and with the active participation of all members at all levels, to meet and exceed customer expectations. Total Quality Management (TQM) is a philosophy which combines organization's teamwork with the quality management philosophies of Deming and Juran.

Essentially too, Stahl (1995) opined that total quality management is a management tool which adopts a system approach to management that aims to continuously increase value to customers by designing and continuously improving organizational processes and systems. MacDonald (1999) stressed that TQM is a total commitment to quality. The core of Total Quality Management is the customer-supplier interface, both externally and internally. Williams (2007:591) posited that Total Quality (TQM) is an integrated organization-wide strategy for improving product and service quality. He maintains that TQM is not a specific tool or technique. Rather, TQM is a philosophy or overall approach to management that is characterized by three principles: customer focus and satisfaction continuous improvement and team work. Total quality management is a deviation from traditional management in several respects. First, quality is seen as an investment that is aimed at improving quality that is always well designed and implemented, unlike traditional management that recognize quality as a cost and therefore very expensive. Secondly, the former is proactive and seeks to prevent ugly incidence, while the latter is reactive and seeks to remedy a situation after it has occurred. Total quality management presupposes defect or error free processes and activities through continuous improvement, unlike traditional management that accepts and accommodates defects.

The Importance and Benefits of Total Quality Management to the Public Sector

The increasing emphasis on the role of the public administrator as a manager and the need to apply the managerial tools familiar in the private sector has been

underscored (Peters and Pierre 2007:4). This drive toward generic management has almost certainly enhanced the efficiency and perhaps the effectiveness of the public sector despite the contention by critics that it has also undervalued the peculiarly public nature of management in government and the need to think about public sector values other than sheer economic efficiency (Stein 2002:12). Another fundamental change in the public sector is the increasing linkage of the state and society in the delivery of public services. The above development is a likely plausible explanation for why the reform of the governmental sector had focused on the managerial aspects of government, attempting to make government more efficient, effective, entrepreneurial and economical. After all, few governments have succeeded in improving the quality of service, increasing productivity, and reducing costs at the same time as Milakovich (1991:19) rightly articulated.

Also, past productivity efforts have generated valuable insights for public administrators who seek greater output from individual employees by stressing externally imposed methods of goal setting, decision making, programme evaluation and performance appraisal. In fact, techniques like management by objectives, programme evaluation review, and planning programming budgeting systems have been typically used to set and implement public sector goals and organizational practices such as individual performance appraisal and management, ranking for pay purposes, merit increases, and bonuses have also been employed to motivate the work force so as to achieve public priorities (Cayer 2005; Morley 2006). Despite the intentions, the application of these methods has not eliminated inefficiency or ineffectiveness, wasted resources, lack of responsiveness and poor quality service delivery in the public sector.

Arguably critical to the actualization of the new public sector orientation therefore is the adoption and application of total quality management for a result-oriented service delivery that did not exist hitherto largely because of the peculiar nature and environment of the sector. The above reality underscores the desirability and usefulness of TQM particularly due to the fact that despite the many reforms in the public sector, it is still plagued in varying degrees with the problem of inefficiency, ineffectiveness, wastage, mechanization, routinization and bureaucratic rigidity or slow dance. The importance and consequential benefits of total quality management to the public sector is thus evident in its philosophy and deliberate approach to quality in the light of the changing total customer (internal and external) expectation and satisfaction, cost reduction strategy and corporate renewal.

The benefits derivable from the use of TQM include satisfied customers, improved financial performance and cutting edge advantage, employee morale and motivation as well as reduced inter-departmental conflict. And since total quality management is primarily seen as a shift in the way of doing work and clients are processed for effective and quality service delivery, it engineers change in the culture (norms, values and belief systems) of organizations and

how they function as well as their decision making processes and power base. The desirability of TQM becomes even more compelling considering its utility as a veritable tool for managing the future and its wider application that transcends just assuring product or service quality since it is a way of managing people and business processes to ensure complete customer (internal and external) satisfaction at every stage. TQM, combined with effective leadership, culminates in organizations doing the right thing right at the first time.

The Practicability and Efficacy of Total Quality Management in the Nigerian Public Sector: A Critical Examination

The public sector as the sector of the economy established and operated by the government and its agencies is distinguishable from the private sector and organized on behalf of the citizenry. The public sector is, in fact, part of the state that deals with the delivery of goods and services by and for the government, whether at the national, regional or the local level and its activities include delivering social security, administering urban planning and organizing national defences. As organizations that exist as part of government machinery for implementing policy decisions and delivering services that are of value to citizens (Suleiman 2009: 13), total quality management is both desirable and inevitably beneficial. In the face of the above reality, the critical issue is whether or not total quality management is practicable and will be efficacious in the Nigerian public sector. While a one-sentence reaction is not sufficient, the issue can appropriately be examined against the background of the public sector environment.

The public sector environment in Nigeria is such that there is a dilemma arising from the twin expectations of the public; the dilemma is between public expectations that government organizations should be responsive by adapting to unique situations in meeting the needs of the various publics and the public demand for government organizations to be highly responsible such that it should follow strict rules and procedures in dealing with problems on a fair and equitable basis. This pull between the above two ends is evidently a complex one because despite the expectations of the public and the strategic role of public sector, its poor performance has been a topical one. Although public sector performance was taken for granted, they are today under attack for lack of performance. Thus, the increased emphasis on efficiency and accountability in the public sector has brought about renewed interest in productivity improvement. Regrettably, however, productivity is not only subject to political interpretations in the public sector, its definition is also so inclusive in the public sector that it is not truly concerned with the need to include quality or effectiveness indicators.

Notably, the difference between public and private sector definitions of productivity has not only been well documented, a fundamental difference between these productivity perspectives lies in the critical role played by the market place in arriving at the concepts of efficiency and effectiveness as Steiss (2006:15) rightly underscored. While efficiency is concerned with the amount of

work performed with a given level of resources, effectiveness has to do with the accomplishment of stated goals. Also, the relationship between effectiveness and efficiency is solidified by the market place, while it is a lot difficult to determine in the public sector environment. The difficulty is due to the fact that there is no market place to inform public service producers what to provide or to indicate acceptable quality and price levels. In fact, there only exists a weak competitive environment to ensure that the services are efficiently delivered. Thus, productivity is a much more ambiguous and subjective concept in the public sector. This ambiguity and subjectivity problem lies at the root of the debate surrounding the definition of public sector productivity. No wonder, managing for performance is one area in which public sector organizations differ significantly from the private sector.

In the Nigerian public sector, performance is seemingly an exception rather than the rule and public offices have for too long been showcases for the combined evils of inefficiency and corruption that have become impediments to effective implementation of government policies (Servicom 2008:3). The real victim in the end is the nation which is denied effective positive contribution of the public sector to national development and progress and at the receiving end are the Nigerian people who are being short-changed by the consequential effects of the poor and appalling quality service of the sector. At least, these organizations embody the values of the Nigerian society. And the nature and character of the public sector environment in Nigeria is such that the ability of the sector to meet social needs in the face of critical national objectives is constrained, especially with the central weakness of public institutions that is typified by dependence upon a budget that perpetuates economic survival rather than on payment from a satisfied customer.

A fundamental question that immediately arises, centre on whether or not the Nigerian public sector environment will permit or enable the practicability, workability and efficacy of total quality management. Arguably, TQM is practicable, yet its reality will require a comprehensive and pragmatic non-political administrative restructuring, re-engineering and re-organization to meet the changing demands of the sector, institutional support and sustained effort to transform such reform initiatives (plans) into concrete reality as well as customer focus and orientation. Additionally, there must be attitudinal change at the macro (governmental) and micro (organizational) levels such that there will be genuine support for and commitment to the realization of TQM philosophy, policy, plan and practice in the public sector. Such support and commitment must culminate in the development, entrenchment and efficacy of a total quality management culture that will expectedly permeate the Nigerian public sector. Thus, if total quality management philosophy is to be part of public sector culture in Nigeria, the political and senior administrative class must learn how to live and breathe the TQM philosophy that will embody the values of commitment, participation, synergy and ownership, competitiveness, cost consciousness, innovation, customer focus and orientation, the need for modern management practice and a genial climate.

Concluding Remarks and Recommendations

Research and experience have shown that improved results are best achieved through striving for world class performance in five quality elements: customer focus, employee improvement, quality assurance, management leadership and measurement. The public sector environment is however such that the tendency to constrain effectiveness and efficiency and consequently slow down quality service delivery is evident. All the same, total quality management is practicable and has the potency of been efficacious in the Nigerian public sector if the organizations adapt to develop the internal quality and pragmatic action-based culture needed to effectively implement total quality management. A re-created, re-engineered, revitalized and service-based Nigerian public sector environment that would be genial to and clement for TQM is a desideratum. Additionally, the desirable and inevitable total quality management philosophy, culture and practice should evolve from strategic plans and be premised on stakeholders' expectation where workers are given new tools to analyze problems, break down barriers between functions and get enhanced and pragmatic results. This feat is a possibility if total quality management is accepted not as a fad or rhetoric, but as a culture that is central and critical to the re-engineering, restructuring, partnering, downsizing, re-alignment, re-positioning and de-layering as well as re-vitalizing and re-inventing processes that are germane for a quality-driven public sector in Nigeria. Institutional support and sustained efforts to transform reform initiatives (plans) into concrete reality as well as customer focus and orientation, vision, synergy, attitudinal change, competitiveness, cost consciousness, innovation, modern management technique and a genial climate are therefore equally a desiderata.

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